

## Stick Around by PaperBodies

**Series:** [Harringrove April Challenge \[12\]](#)

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** M/M, References to Depression, Suicide Attempt, This one is angsty, but it turns out ok?, much less fluffy than usual

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**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Steve Harrington

**Relationships:** Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

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**Summary:**

Steve stood at the top of the bluff, looking out over the ocean. The sun was setting over the water, and a light breeze stirred his hair around his face. He smiled. This was so much better.

He had done this at the quarry on five separate occasions over the past two years, stood at the edge of the drop and stared out over the water. Ultimately, it wasn't a desire to live that had prevented him from taking the last step, over the edge and down. It was a combination of things. He didn't want Hopper to have to deal with the fallout. He didn't want any of the nerds involved. And, most importantly, Hawkins had taken enough from him. He didn't want to give it this, too.

Here, though. Here was so much better. The view out over the ocean was spectacular. No one he knew was going to be called out to deal with it. He looked out at the waves crashing below; if he was lucky, no one would have to deal with it at all. He would just disappear quietly under the waves, never to surface again.

## 1. Day 20: Breeze

### Author's Note:

Hi friends! This series has been pretty much fluff so far, but we're taking a hard left into angst today. It works out, but there's some pretty explicit suicidal ideation and references to suicide attempts here, so take care of yourselves.

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Dustin was going to be furious, obviously, but he would recover. He was resilient—they all were. And they were headed off to bigger and better things, eventually. Robin too. She had gone off to Berkeley for school and was thriving. She had invited Steve to come with her, but he wanted her to live her life without worrying about him. She had looked at him uneasily when he had told her that he was coming here. He just wanted to see it, he had lied, and she hadn't protested.

The truth was, he was tired. Tired of being a disappointment to his parents. Tired of waking up screaming, visions of flower-faced monsters in his head. Tired of being so afraid, all the time, that the

door to hell was going to open again. Tired of pretending that he was keeping it together. Tired of pretending that he hadn't lost his—

Well. They had never put a name to it, and Steve had been too afraid to push. It had been a secret, obviously, and Steve was maybe most tired of hiding. Of grieving alone, because he hadn't told Billy's secrets while he was alive, and he wasn't about to start after he died. So he kept his mouth shut, and he sat with Max whenever she was willing to let someone else see her in pain, and he listened to her talk about Billy, and he kept it together because it wasn't about him. And then she left and he went upstairs and screamed until he couldn't breathe.

They all knew something was wrong. It had been two years, and Steve still had dark circles permanently etched under his eyes. He was too skinny, and he zoned out too often, and his laugh rarely reached his eyes, but he lied every time someone asked about it because half of it wasn't his secret to tell, and maybe he couldn't do anything else about this whole completely fucked-up situation, but he could refuse to betray Billy that way.

And now he was just so goddamn tired of all of it. He was ready to let it all go. He took a deep breath of cool ocean air. He closed his eyes and enjoyed the feeling of the breeze on his face for a few long moments. He inhaled deeply, and smiled a little to himself. He felt like he should say something, maybe, but nothing came to mind. So he exhaled and stepped forward.

Only he didn't actually move forward, because something jerked him back, hard, away from the edge of the cliff. He let out a shocked breath as his back collided with a warm, familiar chest, and then there were hands on his arms, turning him around, and he was staring into Billy Hargrove's face. Billy Hargrove's *very angry* face.

Billy gave him a single hard shake.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing, Harrington?" Billy growled at him. Steve closed his eyes, hard, wondering if this was a hallucination his brain was providing as he plummeted toward the

rocks below. He quickly decided that if he was making this up, Billy would be significantly less angry. He also wouldn't be shaking him again. Steve opened his eyes.

"You're dead," he blurted out, and then his body caught up and he shoved Billy backwards, hard. Billy clearly wasn't expecting it, and he took one step back. As he did, his hand shot out to grab the front of Steve's shirt, like he was worried Steve was going to lunge for the cliff again. He wasn't—at least, not until he got some fucking answers. After that, he could reassess.

Steve looked down at the hand in his shirt and then back up at Billy's face. Billy was still scowling at him. He glared back. They stood there like that for several long moments. Finally, Steve couldn't take it anymore.

"You're a lot less dead than I was led to believe." His voice was short, clipped, his tone icy. "You want to explain that?" Billy sighed, but didn't let go of Steve's shirt.

"That's a long story," he finally said. Steve nodded slowly; it was clear from Billy's expression that it was also a painful story. Steve was tempted to insist, to lash out, to scream that Billy owed him an explanation, but he knew that was the fastest way to make Billy shut down completely. Billy had clearly changed since he died (and wasn't *that* a wild thing to have to think), but Steve was guessing he hadn't changed *that* much.

"Fine," Steve said. "We can come back to how you're alive, and why you didn't think that was worth mentioning later." Billy flinched a little at that, and Steve saw an expression that might have been guilt pass over his face, but it disappeared quickly. He might have felt bad about pushing, but he knew that if he let in anything other than pure, icy fury right now he was going to start screaming and never stop, so he shoved it down ruthlessly. "Why are you *here*?" he asked in the same clipped voice. Billy sighed.

"El reached out to me." Steve just stared at him. "Apparently her powers came back to full strength two weeks ago, about the same time you stopped returning everyone's calls. She discovered that I wasn't actually dead—"

“How?” Steve asked, and Billy shrugged.

“I don’t know. I asked her, and there was a very long pause and then she changed the subject. Anyway, Dustin mentioned to Max that he was worried about you, and Max asked El to check in. She reached out and whatever she found worried her enough that she contacted me. She just told me to be ready.” Steve was still stuck on the first part of that.

“So everyone else knows you’re alive,” Steve said flatly, and Billy shook his head.

“No one besides El knows I’m alive,” he said. “It took some convincing, but she agreed not to tell anyone.”

“How?” Steve asked again, and Billy knew he wasn’t asking about Billy’s powers of persuasion. He grimaced and looked away.

“She hijacked my car radio. Which is fucking unnerving, by the way. Today she just gave me a location and told me I needed to hurry.” He shrugged again, trying to seem casual, but Steve saw that his hands were shaking a little. “I guess I’m glad I ran a few stop signs on the way.” He looked back at Steve, frowning. “What the fuck, Steve?”

“I could ask you the same question,” Steve shot back, and Billy winced.

“Okay,” he finally said, “but can we talk about it somewhere other than here?” He tugged lightly on Steve’s shirt. “Standing this close to the cliff is making me very nervous.”

“Fine,” Steve said after a long beat, and he led the way back down the trail toward the parking lot.

## 2. Day 21: Fire

### Summary for the Chapter:

They sat on the patio of Steve's rented house, sipping beers and not talking. Steve felt wrung out from all of the emotions of the day, and Billy kept glancing at him and then away. The sun had set long ago, and Steve had lit a fire in the fire pit just so he had something to do with his hands.

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"Want to see something?" Billy finally asked. Steve just stared at him. Billy leaned in and Steve couldn't stop himself from surging forward when Billy reached a hand out, too close to the fire. Billy cocked an eyebrow at him.

"Relax, Harrington. It's fine. I'm not the one who tried to step off a cliff today." Steve flushed and looked away. "Just...watch." Billy reached slowly toward the flames. He got close, far too close, but his skin didn't turn red and blister like it should have. He kept reaching until his hand was buried in the center of the flames. He held it there for a long moment, and then pulled it out and held it up. It was completely untouched, skin its usual gold, fine hairs still running up his arm.

"What the fuck?" Steve breathed. Billy shrugged.

"Fuck if I know. Some side effect from something they used to keep me alive, maybe? I guess I could have asked the creepy government scientists about it, but I didn't feel like giving them a reason to keep me in that goddamn facility for the rest of my life, so I kept my mouth shut." He grinned wolfishly at Steve. "Pretty cool, though, right?" Steve was suddenly and completely just...done. The day had been too much.

Billy's smile vanished as Steve carefully set down his beer, and then stood up and walked into the house. He didn't pause as Billy called his name, just headed straight up the stairs and into the master bathroom. He closed the door carefully behind him, and then climbed into the bathtub and pulled the curtain. Steve knew better than anyone that safety was a myth, but the small space helped, when he felt like this, to create the illusion of it. He sat down, pulling his knees to his chest and dropping his face into them. He concentrated on breathing.

It didn't take long for Billy to find him. He was, after all, the only person in the world who had a pretty good idea where to start looking. Billy knew what to do next, too. He climbed into the tub and maneuvered Steve until he was curled into a tight ball in the vee of Billy's legs, Billy's arms draped over his own around his knees. It felt familiar and grounding, and for a moment Steve hated Billy so much that he could hardly breathe. He had been doing this by himself for almost *two years*, and Billy had been alive that entire time. Billy had left him alone, and Steve was choking on it. He wanted to shove Billy away, to tell him to fuck off, scream that Steve was doing just fine on his own, but, well. That ship had sailed when Billy had yanked him back from the edge of a cliff earlier. He shuddered as he realized how close he had come to leaving a world that somehow, improbably, still had Billy Hargrove in it.

He was so caught up in his own thoughts that it took him a minute to realize that Billy was talking. His forehead was resting on the back of Steve's neck, and he was murmuring "sorry, I'm so fucking sorry" into Steve's back over and over again. Steve took a deep breath.

"What the fuck, Billy?" For a few long moments, Billy just breathed, every exhale stirring the long hair at the back of Steve's neck.

"You were supposed to move on," he said quietly. Steve laughed bitterly at that.

"Yeah, well I'm obviously thriving. So. You can go back to whatever you were doing." He managed to leave off the *without me* at the end of the sentence, but he was pretty sure Billy heard it anyway. Billy's arms tightened around his.

“Mostly sitting around my apartment, thinking about everything I’ve managed to royally fuck up in my short life.”

“Is it at least a shitty apartment?” Steve asked after a pause. Billy laughed, startled.

“No, it’s a pretty nice apartment. It turns out the government is willing to pay quite a bit of money to make sure that I never talk about dying or being possessed or the existence of monsters.” His voice was quieter when he continued. “They were also willing to pay quite a bit of money to make sure that I never contacted anyone from Hawkins again, under any circumstances.” Steve turned his head to meet Billy’s eyes.

“I signed a truly staggering amount of paperwork promising just that,” he said, eyes steady on Steve’s.

“So that’s why?” Steve asked. It didn’t seem like a good enough reason. Billy sighed and shook his head.

“It’s not the only reason.” Billy didn’t continue, and Steve let the silence stretch out around them. “I never brought anything good into any of your lives,” Billy finally said quietly. Steve took that in, and then turned around so that he sat facing Billy in the tub. It put a little space between them, which was probably a good thing, at least for Steve’s ability to stay angry.

“You don’t believe that,” he said. Billy glanced at him and then away, unwilling to maintain eye contact. Steve was right and he knew it. He knew that Billy knew it too, that they were both picturing the same things. The days when Billy’s steady presence at his side was the only thing that kept him from shaking out of his skin right in front of the nerds. The nights when he actually slept, soothed by the warm body wrapped around his. The easy line of Steve’s shoulders, some days, and the way his laugh used to reach his entire face, for a while.

“Fine,” Billy finally said, “but you still deserved better.” He glanced up again, briefly, and then away. “You deserve better. You deserve someone who isn’t completely fucked up. Someone who isn’t tied up with all this crazy shit. You deserve to move on with your life.” Steve laughed, dropping his face into his hands. He wanted to cry, but if he



started, he wasn't going to stop.

"That's not how it works, Billy," he said without looking up. He could *feel* Billy getting ready to protest, but Steve continued before he could say anything. "I still have nightmares," he admitted, still looking down at the bottom of the bathtub. "I'm still too keyed up all the time, because I feel like I have to be ready in case it happens again. And I've spent the past two years grieving you in secret. I haven't moved on at all. And I'm so *tired*," he whispered finally. Billy reached toward him and then stopped.

"I'm really, really sorry. I wouldn't have..." He trailed off, and when he continued his voice was flat. "It was bad for a really long time, Steve," he said quietly. "I'm doing better now, but I was in some secret government facility for a while, learning how to walk again and use my hands again and fucking...breathe on my own." Steve sucked in a breath. "And then they kept me there after that because the first time they gave me a butter knife, I tried to open up my wrists with it." Steve's heart ached, and despite himself, he felt tears trickling down his cheeks.

"Why?" he asked, although Billy had all the same reasons he did, and then some. Billy shrugged, but his hands were shaking again.

"I killed a lot of people. I'm doing better now, but at the time, I didn't think I deserved to survive it." Steve skipped the platitudes; it wasn't like he had a ton of credibility at the moment on the topic of choosing not to die. But he hated to picture Billy going through that on his own.

"I could have been there," he whispered. Billy shook his head.

"I didn't want that for you," he said firmly. There was a long silence. Steve thought about arguing, but he was too tired to fight about the past anymore.

"Now what?" he finally asked. Billy looked at him, and his smile was sad. He made a helpless gesture with his hands.

"I don't fucking know, pretty boy. I didn't get my shit together that long ago. I'm still working on just...getting through the day every

day, you know?” Steve nodded because he did know. He had done that for a long time, until even that became too difficult. “What about you?” Billy finally asked. Steve shrugged and tried to smile.

“Didn’t really have much planned after today,” he said, and Billy flinched a little.

“Maybe we could...” Billy started and then trailed off. He took a breath and squared his shoulders and started again. “Maybe we could figure it out together? Not, like, *together* together, if you don’t want to, but just...” he trailed off again. Steve stared at him.

“I’m still so mad at you,” he whispered. “You *left* me.” Billy’s shoulders slumped and his face crumbled a little at that. He nodded, looking down.

“I get it,” he said.

“But I feel like I could be mad at you just as well from here as I could from Hawkins,” Steve continued slowly, and Billy’s head snapped up, eyes cautious.

“Yeah?” he asked tentatively.

“Yeah,” Steve nodded. “I mean, I should probably stick around at least until we get that worked out, right?” Billy picked up his second meaning immediately.

“So no more trips to the cliffs?” Billy asked softly, holding Steve’s gaze. Steve shrugged.

“Not immediately, anyway.” Billy’s smile was small, but genuine.

“I can work with that,” he said.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Did I give Billy superpowers in a fic where all he really does is talk about his feelings? Yes. Am I sorry? No.

Also, I bumped up the chapter count, so additional

angst ahoy!

### 3. Day 26: Easy

#### Summary for the Chapter:

After three weeks, Steve was pretty sure he had made a mistake. The initial shock of Billy being alive had gradually worn off, and Steve found himself falling back into familiar patterns, assuring Billy he was fine even when it was clear that he wasn't. Numbness crept in from the edges, making everything feel difficult. Things came to head on the fifth day in a row that Steve refused to get out of the guest bed.

Billy threw back the covers and hauled him out, Steve giving an undignified yelp as Billy dragged him into the bathroom and shoved him into the shower. Billy turned the water on as Steve sank to the floor of the bathtub, where he sputtered furiously in the spray.

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"Take a fucking shower," Billy snarled as he stalked out of the bathroom, closing the door behind him. Half an hour later he came back to find a significantly cleaner Steve wrapped in a towel, lying in the bottom of the tub, the water off.

"You can't keep going like this," Billy said, as he dropped down to sit

on the bathmat. Steve stayed where he was, feet propped up against the wall. He wasn't sure what to say to that, so there was a long silence.

"I guess I just thought it would be different," Steve finally said to the ceiling.

"Different how?" Billy asked, and his tone was curious rather than accusatory. Steve appreciated the effort that probably took, so he thought hard about his answer.

"I thought it would be easy," he finally said. "Or easier, anyway." Billy gave a quiet little laugh.

"Come on Harrington," he said softly, "when have things with us ever been *easy*?" Steve opened his mouth to argue, to give examples of all the times things had happened smoothly, effortlessly, the way he thought love was supposed to go. He wasn't going to use that word, obviously. He knew better, because while Billy Hargrove had clearly changed, he probably hadn't changed *that* much. As Steve dug through his memories in search of specific examples, though, he gradually realized that Billy was right. That somehow, over the past two years, whatever relationship he had shared with Billy had acquired a kind of haziness, had been smoothed over by time and grief to create a vague, lingering impression of longing glances, of wordless connections, of secrets shared readily under the cover of darkness.

Lying in the bottom of the bathtub, damp and tired of feeling numb, Steve pushed past that impression and did his best to remember how things had actually been between them. The way they started with glaring and taunting and shoving that built up into fists and blood and bruising that took weeks to fade. How long it took to come back from that, the way paved with tiny gestures and small, tentative acts that could only barely be called kindnesses, always two steps forward and one step back. The way that every secret either one of them yielded came unwillingly, clawed out of their throats by sheer force of will in the rare moments when a stubborn desire to connect with someone outweighed pride and fear. The way he never knew whether Billy would push him away or pull him close, never knew whether to expect sharp teeth or gentle apologetic lips, fingers clenched

bruisingly tight or resting soothingly on his spine.

The way he never quite knew which one he wanted more.

The feeling of uncertainty he carried around constantly, hoping it all meant something, examining every ambiguous, maddening moment from every angle, trying to wring out an answer he could never quite bring himself to ask for.

Steve sat up in the bathtub, suddenly feeling every pulse of blood beneath his skin.

“It was never about saving each other,” he breathed. Because it wasn’t, and they hadn’t, even if Steve’s hazy, worn-smooth memories told him they had. Steve hadn’t known about the monster who lived on Cherry Lane, and Billy hadn’t known about the flower-faced monstrosities that haunted Steve’s dreams. They had faced their respective monsters alone, and they hadn’t always won. They both had the scars to prove it. Scars they had avoided asking about, before, but that didn’t mean they hadn’t helped each other.

“What?” Billy asked, clearly confused.

“It wasn’t about safety,” Steve said, like it was obvious what he was talking about. Billy frowned, brows furrowed.

“Safety doesn’t exist,” he said softly, and Steve stared at him. Then he grinned, wide and genuine. No, what they had was never about safety (though maybe, Steve thought absently, it could be, someday, when they were both way less fucked up)—it was about feeling *alive*. Wanting to live, even when it was really, really hard.

Steve knew, suddenly and with complete certainty, that the last three weeks had been a mistake, but only because he had spent them looking for the wrong thing. He had been waiting for things to get easy, for the mere fact of Billy’s presence to soften all the jagged edges, when *easy* had never been the point.

“I’m sorry,” he said suddenly, eyes intent on Billy’s face.

“What are you sorry for, pretty boy?” Billy asked voice rough. He was leaning up against the wall now, head tipped over to look in Steve’s

general direction. Steve let out a wet little laugh because really, what *wasn't* he sorry for?

"I..." he started, and didn't know how to continue. He clambered out of the bathtub and planted himself on Billy's lap, ignoring his damp towel, framing Billy's face with his hands. Then he leaned in and pressed a sweet, chaste kiss to Billy's lips. Billy's eyebrows shot up, but he returned the kiss, hands sliding to Steve's waist.

"I'm sorry I thought it was going to be easy," Steve said, when he pulled back from the kiss. Billy's thumbs rubbed small circles over his hips. "I'm sorry I forgot how it really was. I'm sorry I wouldn't get out of bed," he added after a pause. "Things just started feeling really hard again, you know?" Billy nodded and his brow furrowed.

"You need help, baby," he said tentatively, and Steve's gaze fell away from Billy's face. He gave a short nod.

"I know," he said, looking down, hands sliding to Billy's neck. It wasn't the first time he'd heard it. He had even gone to therapy, for a while, but the therapist had made him feel small and stupid, and he couldn't talk about the monsters anyway, so it hadn't lasted very long.

"I talked to somebody, eventually," Billy offered. "At the lab. I fought it for a really long time, but they weren't going to let me go until I did, so." He shrugged.

"You did?" Steve asked, surprised. Billy had said he was doing better now, but somehow Steve had never pictured him in therapy.

"Yeah," Billy said. "I didn't say much to start with, but the woman they sent me to waited me out. She was stubborn. And she helped, once I started talking." He smiled a little at the memory, and then hesitated. "They had a few people like that, at the lab. Therapists who knew about the monster stuff. I still have their contact info, if you ever wanted to talk about that." Steve studied Billy's face for a long moment.

"I'll try," he finally said quietly, dropping his gaze. That had never been an option before, but maybe it would help, to talk to someone

who knew. If it had worked for Billy, maybe it could work for him. He sagged a little and sighed. "I just...I kept waiting for it to be easy, but it wasn't easy before either." He looked at Billy and took a deep breath. "It was just worth it, to keep waking up, even when it was hard." He paused, searching for a way to say the rest of it. "Being with you made me feel alive," he finally said. Billy stared at him, eyes a little wide.

"Yeah," he finally said, a little hoarsely, "I get that." Steve smiled, hearing the confession underneath. He leaned in for a second small, sweet kiss.

"I mean," Steve said when he pulled back, "I think we could probably be a *little* nicer to each other than we used to be, and still get the same effect." Billy grinned at him and pulled him a little closer.

"Why don't we try it and find out?" he said, and leaned back in for a longer, deeper kiss.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Look, I just need everyone on this show to get so much fucking therapy from very, very good therapists, ok? Ok.

Hardly anything happens in this, and I'm not even sorry. [Come yell at me about it on Tumblr!](#)

### **Author's Note:**

You do not understand how long I sat there looking at this, thinking about ending it muuuuch earlier. This bad boy was almost eight paragraphs long and real sad. Unfortunately (or fortunately!) I do not have the courage of my angsty convictions, so I kept going.